



# Beaver Island Water Trail

WATERPROOF  
PADDLING GUIDE



Photo: Uncommon Adventures

**42 MILES** OF WATER TRAIL ADVENTURES

## The Beaver Island Water Trail Experience

Located about 30 miles offshore from the City of Charlevoix, Beaver Island is the largest island in Lake Michigan and the largest of the 14 islands that make up the Beaver Island Archipelago. At 56 square miles, Beaver Island is unique for many reasons, including a beautiful natural environment with plentiful sand dunes, beaches and wetlands, a distinctly diverse ecology, and a close-knit community with a proud Island heritage.

The Beaver Island Water Trail is a 42-mile (68 km) paddling trail that circumnavigates the entire Island. While some parts of the Island (such as Paradise Bay and inland lakes) are more family-friendly areas to paddle, most of the Water Trail is geared toward adventure paddlers who are comfortable paddling in the unpredictable conditions of Lake Michigan and accustomed to rustic access sites and overnight beach camping. If you are a novice paddler, consider a trip to the Island's harbor or inland lakes, or consider hiring a paddling guide.

### WARNING

Canoeing and kayaking on Lake Michigan can be dangerous. Serious bodily injury and loss of life can and does occur. Varying water conditions and depths, fallen trees, rocks, currents, waves and other phenomenon of Lake Michigan create constantly changing conditions and hazards. This book is provided only as a general guide and is not to be relied upon to identify all hazards. All distances are approximate. Prior to any paddling trip on the Beaver Island Water Trail, paddlers are strongly encouraged to check in and register at the Beaver Island Community Center.



# The Beaver Island Archipelago

Beaver Island is about 13 miles long and 6 miles wide. It is the only island in the archipelago home to a permanent population and scheduled ferry and airline services. The other islands are not part of the Water Trail, and it is highly recommended that paddlers do not attempt to reach other islands, as sight lines and actual distances can be deceiving on the big lake.



# Beaver Island Road Map



## Safety on Beaver Island

These basic safety tips will increase your chances of having a safe and enjoyable paddle on Beaver Island:

**1. REGISTER AT THE COMMUNITY CENTER.**

Prior to your paddle, all water trail users should register in the Community Center at 26215 Main Street, right across the street from the ferry dock. Your registration will alert public safety officers to your paddle. There is no cost to register. The Community Center also has useful information about all the amenities and natural features of Beaver Island.

**2. ALWAYS PADDLE WITH THE PROPER EQUIPMENT.**

Life vests are required by law. A whistle, a first-aid kit and a phone are standard equipment.

**3. NEVER PADDLE ALONE.**

Always paddle with at least one other person and do not become separated.

**4. BE AWARE OF THE WATER TEMPERATURE.**

Cold water is extremely dangerous. Take steps to protect yourself from hypothermia.

**5. KEEP TO THE SHORELINE.**

Paddling far from shore can result in becoming lost. Keep the shoreline in sight at all times.

**6. UNDERSTAND THE RIGHT-OF-WAY.**

The rules give priority first to self-propelled craft, including paddling boats, then to sailboats, and lastly to motorized craft.

**7. BE AWARE OF THE WEATHER.**

Conditions can change rapidly. Be aware of forecasts and do not go out during thunderstorms or other adverse weather events. Stay alert to changing weather conditions.

**8. BE AWARE OF THE DAYLIGHT.**

Make sure you leave enough daylight to comfortably finish your trip.

**9. BRING A CHANGE OF CLOTHES IN A DRY BAG.**

It is very likely you will get wet. Bring a change of clothes in a dry bag to avoid hypothermia.

**10. KNOW HOW TO SWIM.**

Make sure you know how to swim before paddling on Beaver Island.

**11. KNOW HOW TO GET HELP.**

To get help, dial **911**. Be advised that there is a 30-second delay when placing a call. Make sure you are aware of your surroundings and can communicate your position to emergency responders. Cell phone coverage is limited. Check with your service provider to confirm coverage.

**12. CARRY A GPS UNIT.**

Beaver Island continues to invest in signage and other access-site amenities. However, several access sites do not yet have signs, and amenities are minimal. Be sure to carry a working GPS unit and this Guide to locate access sites around the Island.



# Paddling Etiquette

## Understand the Right of Way

Prior to getting on the Water Trail, be sure you understand the right-of-way rules. In general, the rules give priority first to self-propelled craft, including paddling boats, then to sail-powered craft, and lastly to motorized craft.

## Minimize Hazards

Stay close to the shore and away from recreational boating channels. When paddling close to the shore, watch for swimmers and be mindful of private property.

## Cross Cautiously and Quickly

When the need arises to cross a commercial or recreational boating channel, do so with caution by checking in all directions for approaching vessels.

## Stay Starboard and Pass Port to Port

If you alter your route in response to an approaching vessel, steer to your right (starboard). This is standard boating procedure.

## Avoid Private Property

In many cases, the shorelands are private property. Plan to only exit the Water Trail at public access points. Private property should only be used in emergency situations.

## Be Helpful and Respectful

Offer assistance if another person is in distress! Remain aware of your surroundings and respectful of others' right to also enjoy the water and shoreline.

## LEAVE NO TRACE

Leave No Trace is an international program designed to empower outdoor enthusiasts to reduce their impact on the environment when hunting, paddling, camping, picnicking, fishing, skiing, or climbing. The program strives to educate all those who enjoy the outdoors about the nature of their recreational impacts, as well as techniques to prevent and minimize such impacts. Leave No Trace is best understood as an educational and ethical program, not as a set of rules and regulations.

### The 7 Principles of Leave No Trace:

1. Plan ahead and prepare. Know your route, weather and wind conditions, and your own capabilities.
2. Travel and camp on established surfaces.
3. Dispose of waste properly. Bring your trash with you when you leave, and clean up more if you can!
4. Leave what you find.
5. Minimize campfire impacts.
6. Respect wildlife. Do not attempt to harass or feed wildlife, and give wildlife a wide berth.
7. Be considerate of other visitors.



## Transportation to Beaver Island

Beaver Island can be accessed by both boat (private or ferry) and airplane (private or commercial).

### BEAVER ISLAND BOAT COMPANY

Ferry service providing travel for passengers, vehicles and freight (e.g., kayaks) between Charlevoix and Beaver Island. 888-446-4095 or (231) 547-2311.

[www.bibco.com](http://www.bibco.com)

### FRESH AIR AVIATION

Air service from the Charlevoix Airport to Beaver Island Township Airport. 888-FLY-RGHT (359-7448) or (231) 237-9482.

[www.freshairaviation.net](http://www.freshairaviation.net)

### ISLAND AIRWAYS

Air service from the Charlevoix Airport to the private Welke Airport. 800-524-6895, Charlevoix local (231) 547-2141, or Beaver Island local (231) 448-2071.

[www.islandairways.com](http://www.islandairways.com)



## Other Recreational Opportunities

Beaver Island is home to an ever-expanding interconnected system of trails and pathways, providing for unique hiking and mountain biking experiences. In addition, the Island's gravel, uncongested roadways are idyllic for family bike rides and long peaceful walks. Expect to exchange a friendly wave with Islanders as you pass!

Beaver Island's unique geographic placement within the Great Lakes Basin also makes it a great destination for sailing, birding and fishing. In addition, the Island's remote location and relatively small development footprint make it an ideal location for gazing at the night sky.

### SUGGESTED GEAR

1. Extra paddle tied to your craft
2. Insect repellent
3. This Guide and a compass, GPS, and other navigational tools
4. Emergency equipment like radios, whistles, and repair kits
5. First-aid kit
6. Extra ropes
7. Pocket knife
8. Flashlight
9. Waterproof matches
10. Cell phone (keep in a dry bag)
11. Extra drinking water and food
12. Waterproof bags
13. Clothing for bad weather (even if the forecast looks good!)
14. Sun protection (sunscreen, wide brim hat, light-colored long-sleeve shirt and pants)



## Accommodations on Beaver Island

There are two formal campsites along the coastline that paddlers can use (see below). Rustic campsites with a small tent platform and fire pit are still under development at other locations around the Island.

The Emerald Isle Hotel offers shower facilities to campers for a fee; (231) 448-2376 or [www.emeraldislehotel.com](http://www.emeraldislehotel.com).

### St. James Township Campground

Located on the north end of Beaver Island. Overlooks Lake Michigan and Garden Island, with views of Squaw and Whiskey Islands. Twelve rustic campsites, pit toilets and hand pumps. No showers or electricity.

### Bill Wagner Memorial Campground

Located on the east side of Beaver Island on the shore of Lake Michigan with a view of the west coast of mainland Michigan. Twenty-two rustic campsites, pit toilets and hand pumps. No showers or electricity.

## Other Accommodations

Beaver Island has other lodging accommodations, including motels, B&Bs, rental homes and inland campgrounds. Accommodations fill up quickly during the summer, so be sure to call ahead of time.

## Eating on the Island

Restaurants and bars are clustered in and around St. James, offering a range of menu items and drinks. Groceries and other wares can be purchased at McDonough's Market, a full-service grocery store.

## Supplies and Other Provisions

Supplies (e.g., batteries, tarps, rope, etc.) can be purchased at the hardware store located just south of the ferry dock.

## Outfitters

### Happy Paddle

At Jewell Gillespie Park. (630) 488-2949.  
[www.happypaddle.com](http://www.happypaddle.com)

### Lakeside Sports

26250 Main Street, adjacent to the ferry dock.  
(231) 448-2166.

## BEAVER ISLAND FUN

Beaver Island has a number of fun and interesting events and festivals throughout the paddling season:

Beaver Island's **St. Patrick Day** and **Fourth of July** holidays both offer festive parades and activities. The Fourth of July weekend is widely regarded as the busiest weekend on the Island.

The **Beaver Island Music Festival** is held at the Beaver Island Hideaway Campground. The Music Festival draws thousands of people to come hear bands and musicians over three days in July each year.

July's **Museum Week** features presentations on nature, oral history and Native American culture, live music, nature walks, a pet show and an art show.

**Baroque on Beaver** is a musical festival and concert series that draws thousands of visitors and musicians from Michigan and beyond. The event is held in various locations throughout the Island during the last week of July and first week of August.

**Homecoming** is an Island-wide event held each August with a festival, food, music and a softball tournament.

For all events on the Island, visit the Beaver Island Community Calendar at [www.biccenter.org/calendar](http://www.biccenter.org/calendar).



## Other Points of Interest

### Marine Museum

The Beaver Island Marine Museum is in an old net shed originally built in 1905 and first used as a museum in 1976. The museum has two floors of exhibits that tell stories of shipwrecks, Coast Guard rescues, ship building, Island vessels, and even diving. The museum is staffed and maintained by volunteers from the Beaver Island Historical Society.



### Historical Society

The Mormon Print Shop was built in 1850 by the Island's Mormon settlers. The building is now used as the Beaver Island Historical Society's main museum, with exhibits on important historical figures as well as diaries and other artifacts. As of this writing, the Beaver Island Historical Society is fundraising for an expansion of this museum, which will be renamed the Museum of Island Life.



### The Protar Home

The Protar Home is one of two sites on Beaver Island registered on the National Register of Historic Places. Maintained by the Beaver Island Historical Society, the historic home and tomb of Feodar Protar draw visitors interested in learning more about this cherished philanthropist and important figure in Beaver Island's history. Photo credit: News on the 'Net.



### Heritage Park

Heritage Park is maintained by the Beaver Island Historical Society and located on Donegal Bay Road. The park features several historical items, including the generator that first provided power to the Island as well as an old tilt-wheel grader. These outdoor exhibits are easily seen from the bike path and the library.



## Beaver Island Birding Trail

As the largest Island in Lake Michigan, Beaver Island is a critical stopover site for migratory birds. Some of the bird species found on Beaver Island are familiar residents like chickadees, woodpeckers and grouse, while others visit the archipelago as part of their annual cycle. In the winter, northern visitors



such as snowy owls, horned larks, snow buntings and long-tailed ducks can be found. However, the greatest diversity of species can be seen during spring and fall migration, as well as

during the summer breeding season. Large flocks of warblers, vireos, sparrows and thrushes feed along the coastal forests and dunes as they migrate in spring. Many of these birds take advantage of a plentiful food source in May: the large swarms of non-biting midges that emerge from Lake Michigan. The Island's 35 birding locations can be easily located by the bright Birding Trail signs along the road.

[www.beaverislandbirdingtrail.org](http://www.beaverislandbirdingtrail.org)

### BIRDING ETIQUETTE

Out of respect for Island property owners and to protect migrating and nesting birds, please observe the following rules of birding etiquette:

1. Access private property only with express permission by owner.
2. Do not approach bird nests under any circumstances.
3. Keep all pets on leashes during breeding season.
4. Do not use taped or smartphone bird calls or songs during breeding season (May 1 - July 15).
5. Please stay on trails to protect ground-nesting birds.



## Invasive Species

Unfortunately, invasive species are a common problem in many Great Lakes communities. One benefit of living on an island is that it can be more difficult for invasive species to establish colonies. However, once invasives are established, it is more expensive and sometimes impossible to remove them. Therefore, even a few invasive species can cause significant disruptions to the ecological integrity of an island.



Clean off vegetation and dry all water from boats and gear before transferring between waterways on Beaver Island. Observations of invasive species can be reported at the Beaver Island Community Center in St. James.

### RESPECT PLANT AND ANIMAL WILDLIFE

Stay away from nesting sites and birds with their young. Many shorebirds and loons use shorelines and interior lakes to raise their young, and disturbance leads to predation. Photograph flowers but do not remove.

## A Unique History

Oral accounts show that Native American tribes passed through Beaver Island on journeys through the Great Lakes, leaving many archaeological artifacts behind. In the mid 1700s, the Odawa migrated westward and permanently settled on Beaver Island. European settlers arrived on the Island in the early 1800s and trapped, fished, and logged on the Island. By 1850, settlers were flourishing on the Island.

In 1848, Mormon leader James Strang formed a colony on the Island. The colony contributed to the Island's infrastructure by building roads and homes and cultivating ground. James Strang became the self-proclaimed King of Beaver Island and caused disputes between the Native Americans and other European settlers on the Island. In 1856, this unrest erupted; James Strang was killed and the Mormon colony collapsed.

Irish fishermen and their families began to settle the Island in the mid 1800s. The population of the Island began to grow steadily. Calling the Island "America's Emerald Isle," these families created an Irish culture that still exists today. Fishing and logging remained the mainstays of the Island's economy while the Island accepted new groups of immigrants and entered the industrial age.

Today, the Island remains among Michigan's most beloved and unique communities. The Island community is mix of newcomers and long-standing families, each bringing a unique perspective.



Above: The Beaver Island Lighthouse in 1930 and today. Photos Courtesy of the US Coast Guard and Networks Northwest



At left: A historic Island barn.

# Beginning Your Adventure

This Guide provides information to help you plan your trip along the Beaver Island Water Trail. All Water Trail users are encouraged to register at the Community Center prior to beginning a trip.





Mile 0 is located two blocks south of the Community Center at Jewell Gillespie Park. A table of approximate geographic coordinates and distances between access points is provided in the back of this Guide.

The Map Index on the next page provides an overall view of the coastal Water Trail and the corresponding map pages. Note that the map directions will change beginning on Map 6 to indicate the western side of the route. The key below shows Water Trail features and amenities.





**NOTE:** Beaver Island continues to invest in signage and other access-site amenities. However, several access sites do not yet have signs, and amenities are minimal. Be sure to carry a working GPS unit and this Guide to properly locate access sites.



## Map Features and Trails

-  River / Stream
-  Lake / Pond
-  State or Local Parklands
-  Ferry Crossing

## Water Trail

-  North
-  Access Site
-  Birding Site
-  Coastal Trail Distances
-  Caution / Boat Traffic
-  Coastal Trail
-  Community Center
-  Emergency Call Station

45.74387, -85.50016

**GPS Coordinates, Lat/Long (approximate)**

## Amenities

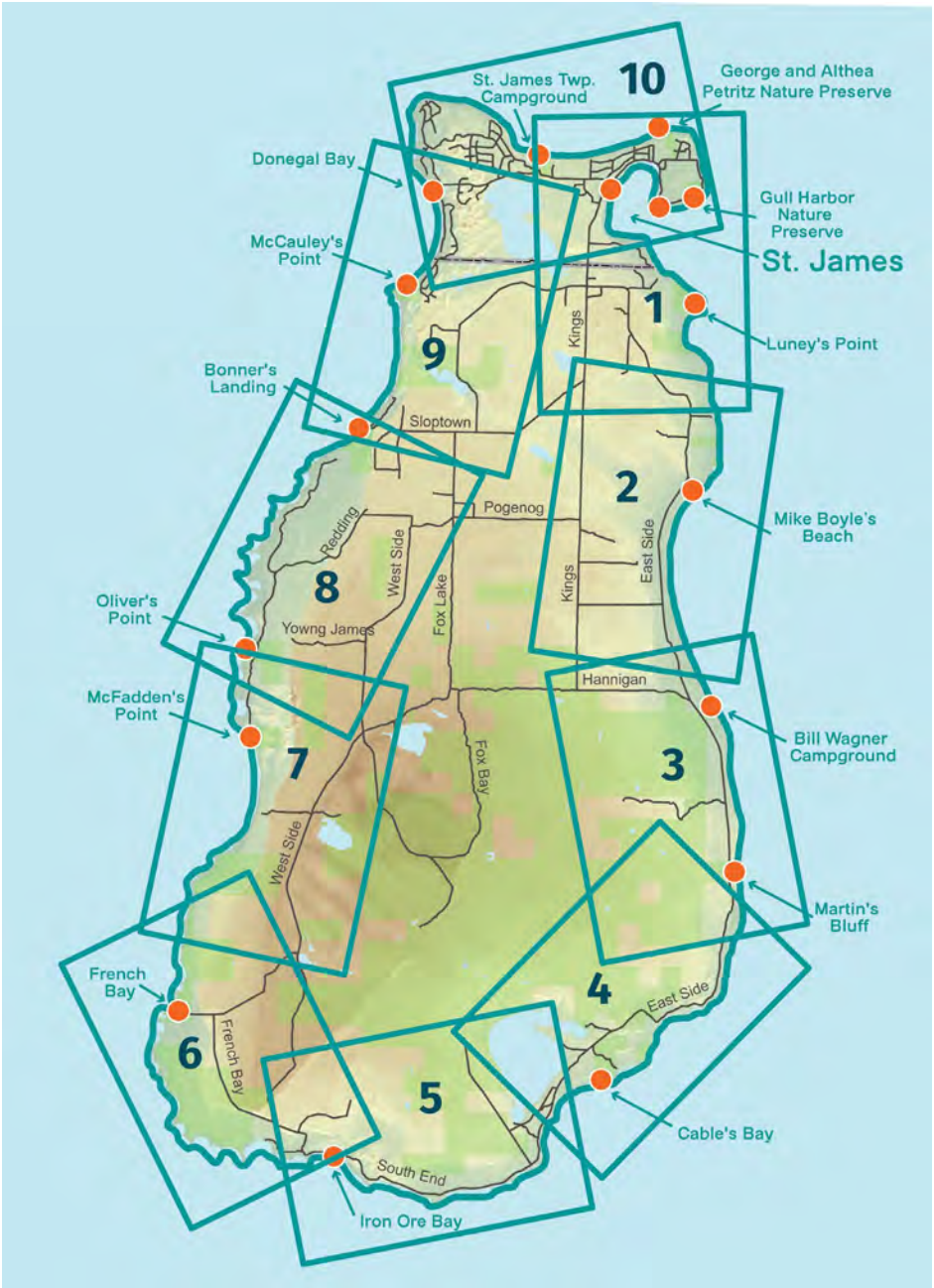
-  Parking
-  Restrooms
-  Rustic Launch
-  Food
-  Rustic Camping
-  Camping Fee
-  Picnic
-  Outfitter
-  Beach
-  Hand Pump
-  Fishing

**For Emergencies  
Dial 9-1-1**

**Note:** Cell phone communications and emergency rescue services may be limited in the southern half of the Island.  
*Be advised that there is a 30-second delay when placing a call.*

# Map Index

The map pages are numbered to correspond to the sections shown below. The North symbol indicates the page position relative to due north.









## MIKE BOYLE'S BEACH

MILES 4 TO 7



### Spotting History

As your paddle takes you south along the Island, you may see old net stakes from early Irish fisherman, or remnants of docks that transported lumber, wool, cattle and crops to the mainland. The access site at Mike Boyle's Beach is currently marked by a large spool buried in the sand.



### Mike Boyle's Beach

45.69383, -85.49947



5 mi

Sand Bay

Paula Simpson  
Trail / CMU /  
Old Burke Farm



6 mi

### CMU Biological Station

You'll also pass the Central Michigan University Biological Station, a base for researchers studying the Great Lakes and the unique biology of Beaver Island.

McCauley

Margaret P Erber  
Nature Preserve

7 mi

Hannigan's Road



### Bill Wagner Campground

The Bill Wagner Campground contains 22 primitive camping sites and a water pump set among a dry mesic forest type. This is an extremely rare natural community, and this location is one of the top seven ranked dry mesic northern forests in the State of Michigan. The Seven Bridges Trail is across the road from the campground.

Seven Bridges Trail

7 mi

### Bill Wagner Campground

45.65708, -85.49423



8 mi

Point LaPar

DNR

Martins Pit

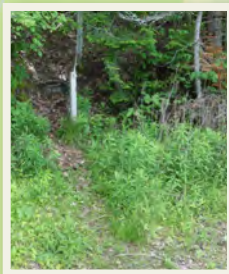
Johnny Martin's Trail

9 mi

Kilty's Pt.

### Martin's Bluff

In the early 1990s, a portion of Martin's Bluff fell into Lake Michigan, leaving a steep sandy cliff. This cliff is now undergoing succession. The Wicklow Beach Access Road runs along the top of the sandy cliff, affording easy access. It is also the highest viewpoint of Lake Michigan on the east side of the Island, overlooking the village of Goodhart in Emmett County. The bluff can be accessed from the beach via a steep staircase with a rope railing.



### Martin's Bluff

45.62885, -85.48800



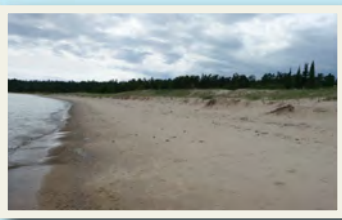
10 mi





# MARTIN'S BLUFF TO CABLE'S BAY

MILES 10 TO 14









## McFadden's Point

45.65075, -85.60630



### Unique Dunes

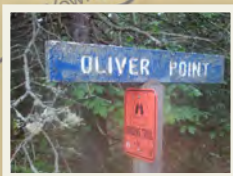
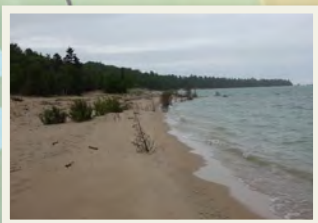
This area contains the largest dune system on the Island. Parabolic dunes are a rare natural feature because they require a special combination of wind, sand and water action. Numerous blowouts give these dunes their characteristic shape. Piping plovers, a critically endangered shorebird species, have been known to nest in this area.





# OLIVER'S POINT TO BONNER'S LANDING

MILES 27 TO 31



## Oliver's Point

A foot path takes you from Oliver's Point to Mrs. Redding's Trail.

## Donegal Bay Beach

45.74437, -85.56378



34 mi



33 mi

## McCauley's Point

45.72830, -85.56974



32 mi

### Protar's Tomb

Russian immigrant Feodor Protar was a self-taught healer who served as the Island's unofficial doctor from 1893 until his death in 1925. His historic house and a tomb built in his honor can still be viewed.



31 mi

## Bonner's Landing

45.70192, -85.58239



## Font Lake



Font Lake

### McCauley's Point

McCauley's Point contains a system of dunes subject to continual wind and wave erosion.

### Kuebler Trail

The Kuebler Trail is the last intact stretch of the former railroad bed and runs behind the Barney's Lake Nature Preserve, with a trailhead at Protar's Tomb.

Barney's Lake Preserve

## Barney's Lake



Microwave Tower on Sloptown Road

Protar's Tomb / Kuebler Trail

Sloptown

Fox Lake



Sucker Point

39 mi

## George and Althea Petritz Nature Preserve

45.75498, -85.50785



### The St. James Campground

Located up a steep bluff, but can be accessed from a footpath at the shore. Here, the night sky puts on a brilliant show undimmed by mainland light pollution. During times of active sunspot activity, the aurora borealis — the famous “Northern Lights” — provide a dramatic display.

## St. James Twp Campground

45.75078, -85.53821



37 mi

36 mi

### Indian Point

An early Native American settlement was established here along with burial grounds. The first Catholic Church was established here in 1832 by Bishop Baraga from L'Arche Croche, who arrived to convert tribal members to Catholicism. Views of High, Trout, Squaw and Garden islands are easily visible from this area.



## Donegal Bay Beach

45.74437, -85.56378



34 mi

40 mi

## Gull Harbor Nature Preserve



41 mi

## St. James Twp Hall and Harbor Light Park



0 mi

## Jewell Gillespie Park



1 mi

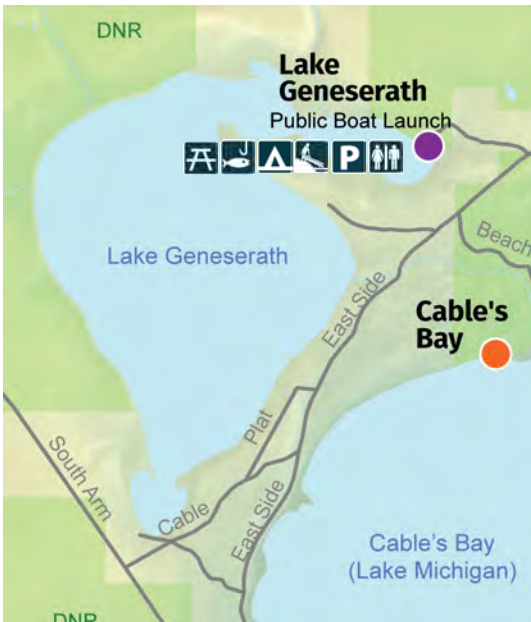
Indian Point



**Font Lake** is approximately 382 acres and is the Island's second largest lake. Part of its western shore is dotted with homes, while a publicly-accessible boat launch is available on the north end. The "floating islands" near the south edge of the lake are vegetative mats that move and are used as nesting sites by loons and other waterfowl.



Photo of a family of common mergansers on Font Lake submitted by Tom Hawkins.

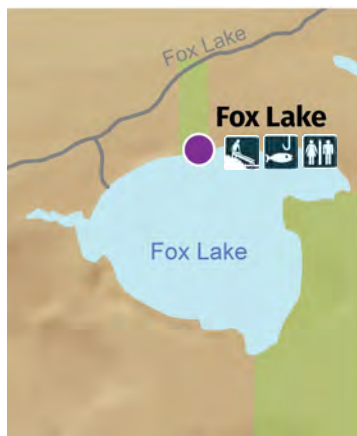


**Lake Geneserath** is the largest of the Island's inland lakes. With depths reaching 55 feet, the lake provides fishing opportunities for species such as bass, northern pike, perch and bluegill, and the lake has been stocked with walleye. A public access site and boat launch are available on the north arm of the lake. Some old cottages and new residential homes dot the shoreline, primarily along the eastern side.





**Barney's Lake** is about 45 acres in size. The lake has been stocked in the past with largemouth and smallmouth bass and continues to provide habitat for bass, northern pike, and even one reported sturgeon in 2014! An access site is available on the northeastern shore, and hiking trails are being developed around the lake.



**Fox Lake** is 75 acres in size and is located in the southwestern interior of the Island. Fox Lake supports a variety of fish and features a small walking trail. Fox Lake's public access site is well known for successful fishing and its proximity to "Big Birch," one of the oldest birch trees in Michigan.



**Greene's Lake** is 62 acres in size and is located in the southwestern interior of the Island. Greene's Lake is shallow and freezes totally most winters. Many rare insects and other animals live in the rich wetlands and extensive bog system surrounding the lake.



**Table of Distances Between Access Points (in miles) and Approximate GPS Coordinates (decimal degrees)**  
**All Paddlers Must Register at the Community Center Prior to Beginning Trip**

Access Site	Miles from Previous	Latitude	Longitude
Jewell Gillespie Park/St. James Township Beach	0.0	45.74511	-85.52044
Luney's Point	2.4	45.72177	-85.50239
Mike Boyle's Beach	2.3	45.69383	-85.49947
Bill Wagner Campground	2.7	45.65708	-85.49423
Martin's Bluff	2.1	45.62885	-85.48800
Cable's Bay	3.5	45.59295	-85.51971
Iron Ore Bay	4.3	45.57922	-85.58446
French Bay	4.3	45.60371	-85.62281
McFadden's Point	3.7	45.65075	-85.60630
Oliver's Point	1.3	45.66568	-85.60781
Bonner's Landing	3.9	45.70192	-85.58239
McCauley's Point	2.2	45.72830	-85.56974
Donegal Bay Beach	1.2	45.74437	-85.56378
St. James Township Campground	3.0	45.75078	-85.53821
George and Althea Petritz Nature Preserve	1.5	45.75498	-85.50785
Gull Harbor Nature Preserve	1.4	45.74387	-85.50016
St. James Township Hall and Harbor Light Park	0.6	45.74303	-85.51015
Jewell Gillespie Park/St. James Township Beach	1.0	45.74511	-85.52044
Distance Around Island	41.4		



# Beaver Island Water Trail

## WATERPROOF PADDLING GUIDE



Photo: Uncommon Adventures

### CONTACT:

Beaver Island Community Center  
26215 Main Street  
Beaver Island, Michigan 49782

231-448-2022

[www.biccenter.org](http://www.biccenter.org)

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[WWW.MICHIGANWATERTRAILS.ORG](http://WWW.MICHIGANWATERTRAILS.ORG)

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Access Association (LIAA).

